

Workshop 7

Teaching Diverse Learners

“When we talk about diversity, we’re usually talking about cultural and linguistic diversity. But children are also diverse learners in terms of their abilities, interests, background knowledge, and the way they approach learning. All of these contribute to who a child is and how that child will learn.”

Dorothy Strickland
Professor of Reading
Rutgers University

One challenge teachers face is how to work with a broad range of cultural, linguistic, and intellectual differences among their students. How can teachers address the varied needs of all their students? What must teachers consider when planning and implementing literacy instruction? In this session, literacy expert Dorothy Strickland discusses key elements of effective instruction that build on student diversity and promote effective learning. You will learn strategies for differentiating instruction to maximize learning for all of your students.

Learning Goals

At the end of this session, you will better understand how to:

- use students’ background knowledge and experiences as a springboard for literacy instruction
- provide opportunities for student choice within the grade-level curriculum
- support student learning through scaffolded instruction
- plan instruction and group students flexibly to address their individual strengths and needs

Materials Needed

- the Examine the Literature Response Chart found at the end of this chapter
- articles: “Help for Struggling Upper-Grade Elementary Readers” and “Questions Teachers Ask About Struggling Readers and Writers” found on the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35.
- the Lesson Plan Chart found at the end of this chapter
- a journal or notebook

Facilitator: You may want to have several copies of charts and articles available for participants without Internet access.

Before You Watch

Session Preparation

To prepare for this workshop session, you will review the key terms, identify the strategies that you already use, and then read two articles on diverse learners.

Facilitator: Have participants complete these activities before arriving for the session.

Key Terms

- Differentiated instruction
- Diverse learners
- Gradual release of responsibility model
- Multilevel instruction
- Scaffolding

Definitions for these terms can be found in the Glossary in the Appendix.



Notebook

What Do You Do?

Consider the diverse strengths and needs of students in your classroom related to culture, language, learning ability, interests, and approach to learning. Think about how you address the differences among your students and promote effective learning. Then jot down your answers to the following questions and, if you are taking this workshop for credit, save them for your Literacy Practices Portfolio:

1. In what ways do you honor the diverse cultures, languages, and background experiences of your students?
2. What instructional practices or strategies do you use to support your struggling readers and writers?
3. How do you provide additional challenges for your strongest readers and writers within the grade-level curriculum?
4. How do you differentiate instruction (for example, through grouping or learning tasks)?
5. How do you use support personnel to enhance learning and help individual students?



Assignment

Examine the Literature

To complete this activity, use the Examine the Literature Response Chart found at the end of this chapter.

Read each article listed below, recording your ideas on the chart during and after reading. When you have finished, save your Literature Response Chart to submit as an assignment.

These articles can be found as downloadable PDFs on the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35.

Help for Struggling Upper-Grade Elementary Readers

This article examines a strategy for developing questions based on the main idea of the text to improve struggling readers' comprehension.

Lublner, Shira. "Help for Struggling Upper-Grade Elementary Readers." *The Reading Teacher* 5, no. 57 (February 2004): 430-438.

Before You Watch, cont'd.

Questions Teachers Ask About Struggling Readers and Writers

In this article, the authors address teachers' questions about meeting the needs of their struggling readers and writers.

Ganske, Kathy, J. K. Monroe, and D. S. Strickland. "Questions Teachers Ask About Struggling Readers and Writers." *The Reading Teacher* 2, no. 57 (October 2003): 118-128.

Analyze the Video

Facilitator: When the workshop session begins, you may want to spend a few minutes discussing the key terms, participants' prior knowledge, and the readings.

Video Summary

In "Teaching Diverse Learners," Dorothy Strickland addresses the range of diversity in classrooms, including differences in language, culture, ability, interests, background knowledge, and approach to learning. Professor Strickland also discusses the importance of teachers understanding the backgrounds of their students in order to plan effective instruction. The video features excerpts from classrooms that illustrate her comments and address the following questions:

- Why should teachers know about the diverse backgrounds of their students?
- What kinds of instruction help teachers address the range of student needs?
- How can teachers put it all together?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Notebook

Watch the Video

Watch the video, "Teaching Diverse Learners," taking notes as you watch. After you watch, jot down your answers to the questions below. If you prefer to watch the video in segments, pause the video when you see the next chapter heading.

Video Segment 1: Why Should Teachers Know About the Diverse Backgrounds of Their Students? (approximate times: 00:00-11:00): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image at the beginning of the video.

In this section, Professor Strickland addresses the importance of teachers understanding the backgrounds of their students in order to plan effective instruction.

- How can teachers build on the background knowledge and experiences of their students when planning literacy instruction?
- What are the pitfalls of assigning characteristics to a certain group of people?
- How can you foster respect for the cultures and diversity of your students?



Video Segment 2: What Kinds of Instruction Help Teachers Address the Range of Student Needs? (approximate times: 11:00-22:00): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image approximately 11 minutes into the video.

In this section, Professor Strickland discusses multilevel instruction and scaffolding instruction.

- What does it mean to "scaffold" instruction? How can teachers effectively use scaffolding strategies to create multilevel instruction?
- In what areas can you provide multilevel instruction in your classroom?
- What choices can you allow your students to make during reading and writing?



Video Segment 3: How Can Teachers Put It All Together? (approximate times: 22:00-end): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image approximately 22 minutes into the video.

In this section, Professor Strickland suggests that teachers provide a wide range of ways students can pursue learning in their classrooms.

- Based on Professor Strickland's explanations and examples, evaluate your own practices. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the differentiated instruction you currently provide?
- What changes might you make? How might you incorporate Professor Strickland's examples into your own practices?



Extend Your Knowledge

Examine the Topic

Students with diverse backgrounds and learning needs require support in learning and applying strategies for reading and writing. This support is critical for successful learning and for developing the motivation necessary to succeed. Read the following statements on scaffolded instruction. Think about how these statements relate to your own classroom instruction, and any questions you have about teaching diverse learners.

Scaffolding is a way of actually helping students understand what it is you want them to know and do and to rehearse it along with you from the point of doing very little—they're observing, watching you as the expert and they are the novice—to taking on more and more responsibility, to a point where they are working on their own. By the time they get to do it on their own in the scaffolded process, they have some idea of what's expected and what to look for.

Kathryn Au

Children often need concentrated instructional support when they need to learn important skills and strategies that they would have difficulty discovering on their own. The gradual release of responsibility model offers such support. In general, the model describes a process in which students gradually assume a greater degree of responsibility for a particular aspect of learning. During the first stage, the teacher assumes most of the responsibility by modeling and describing a particular skill or strategy. In the second stage, the teacher and students assume joint responsibility; children practice applying a particular skill or strategy, and the teacher offers assistance and feedback as needed. Once students are ready, instruction moves into the third stage, in which students assume all, or almost all, of the responsibility by working in situations where they independently apply newly learned skills and strategies. This gradual withdrawal of instructional support is also known as scaffolded instruction because "supports" or "scaffolds" are gradually removed as students demonstrate greater degrees of proficiency.

Mazzoni, S., and L. Gambrell. "Principles of Best Practice: Finding the Common Ground." In *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*, 15. New York: Guilford Press, 2003.

At any point in time, teachers should scaffold instruction enough so that students do not give up on the task or fail at it, but not scaffold so much that students do not have the opportunity to actively work on the problem themselves.

Adapted from Kathleen Clark and Michael Graves. "Scaffolding Students' Comprehension of Text." *The Reading Teacher* 58, no. 6 (March 2005): 571.



Notebook

Consider how you scaffold reading and writing instruction. Then write your answers to the following questions:

- What strategies do you demonstrate/model to assist students during reading and writing?
- What kinds of support can you provide to students as they practice literacy strategies?
- How does this support vary when working with your strong, grade-level, and struggling readers and writers?
- How can you use the gradual release of responsibility model in your instruction across the curriculum?

Extend Your Knowledge, cont'd.



Interactive Activity

Grouping Diverse Learners

Go to the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at
www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35

One of the most important decisions teachers make involves grouping diverse learners students for reading instruction and practice. Students can be grouped in a whole-class setting, in small homogeneous or heterogeneous groups, in pairs, or individually. In this activity, you will read two instructional scenarios, determine which grouping plans are most effective for teaching and learning in specific situations, and then practice grouping diverse learners.

Tips for New Teachers



Tip

Supporting Struggling Readers

Children who struggle in reading often find it difficult to select and to sustain interest in appropriate books for independent reading. Here are some suggestions for promoting independent reading and reading fluency with your struggling readers.

- Create a classroom library that contains books suitable for a wide range of interests and reading levels. Reading levels should range from at least two years below to at least two years above grade level.
- Provide nonfiction texts in your classroom library. These are often of high interest and contain text features and pictures that support reading.
- Encourage independent reading with texts that are both easy and motivating. Students should be able to read them with 96 to 100 percent accuracy in word recognition.
- Encourage reading of books in a series.
- Lead brief book talks on easier books that may be of interest to the students. Students like to read books their teachers enjoy.
- Allow time for students to present their own book talks on favorite books.
- Provide opportunities to practice reading fluency with Reader's Theater, poetry, choral reading, and books on tape (while following along).
- Check in with struggling readers each day to discuss and monitor their independent reading.
- Introduce students to authors who write across a range of reading levels (e.g., Cynthia Rylant, Lois Lowry, Tomi DePaola). Read the more difficult books during read-aloud time; encourage reading of the easier books during independent reading time.
- Allow time for independent reading every day, and observe struggling readers during this time. If they seem disengaged or off task, try to figure out why. Have they chosen a book that is too difficult or of low interest? If so, guide them in the selection of books that are both readable and interesting. Have they chosen an appropriate book but seem unable to get started on their own? If so, you might help by reading the first page or two, and then directing them to finish the chapter or selection on their own.

Put It Into Practice

Choose Activities

In this section, you will apply what you have learned to your own teaching. The following activities are designed to assist you in developing resources for diverse learners in your classroom. Choose one or both of the activities from the list below.

Activity 1: Modeling Main-Idea Questioning

In this activity, teachers will model and provide scaffolding as their students develop main-idea questions.

Activity 2: Scaffolding Instruction

In this activity, you will consider and plan appropriate scaffolding for students when teaching a whole-class book or other text.



Assignment

1. Modeling Main-Idea Questioning

Reread the article, “Help for Struggling Upper-Grade Elementary Readers.” Then follow the procedures listed below. When you have finished, save your written work to submit as an assignment.

1. Review the Instructional Sequence for modeling main-idea questioning.
2. Choose one struggling reader in your classroom and an appropriate text.
3. Plan a lesson based on the selected text to model main-idea questioning for the student.
4. Teach the lesson modeling the concept of main-idea questioning.
5. Reflect on your instruction and your student’s responses.
6. Decide whether the next lesson you plan will be a modeling lesson or a coaching lesson. Give reasons for your decision.



Assignment

2. Scaffolding Instruction

To complete this activity, use the Lesson Plan Chart found at the end of this chapter.

When all students in a classroom are required to read a grade-level book, teachers must make decisions about how to support the struggling readers and how to challenge the strongest readers. The basic framework for a reading lesson involves three components: before reading, during reading, and after reading. Think about a grade-level text you teach to all of your students. What do you want to teach during each phase of the instructional framework? Complete the Lesson Plan Chart to document how you will scaffold student learning during each phase of the instructional framework. An example is provided. When you have finished, answer the questions below. Save your written work to submit as an assignment.

When you have completed the chart, write your answers to these questions:

- What did you learn about helping students become independent learners within a whole-class setting?
- What component of reading instruction (before, during, after) is the most challenging for you? For your students?
- Which strategy are you most likely to implement in your teaching? What are your expected outcomes in terms of student learning?

Reflect on Your Learning



Assignment

What Did You Learn?

Consider what you have learned about diverse learners from Professor Strickland's statements, the classroom examples, and the readings and activities in this session. Write a summary of what you have learned. Use the questions below to guide your thinking. If you are taking this workshop for credit, include it in your Literacy Practices Portfolio.

- Which ideas from the video most closely represent the diverse learners in your classroom and the instruction you provide?
- What changes will you make in your instructional practices to meet the needs of diverse learners?
- How will you differentiate instruction through grouping plans, student tasks, and instructional materials?
- What support and/or resources will you need in order to make these changes?



Assignment

Create a Literacy Practices Portfolio

In this activity, you will continue to build your portfolio of instructional practices. When you have finished, save your written work to submit as an assignment. Your portfolio for this session will include the following items:

- current practices in place in your classroom
- changes you would like to make
- a description of one change you have implemented
- evidence of student learning

1. Current practices

Include your written response from What Do You Do? Then, describe how you teach writing throughout the day. Consider the following questions:

- In what ways are your students diverse culturally and linguistically?
- How are they diverse in their ability to read and write?
- How are they diverse in their interests?
- Describe the diverse approaches to learning in your classroom.
- Discuss the diverse backgrounds and experiences of your students.
- In what ways can you build on this diversity in your instruction?

2. Changes you would like to make

Include your written response from What Did You Learn?

Reflect on Your Learning, cont'd.

3. One change you have implemented

a. Make a change

Choose one instructional change that you described in What Did You Learn? to implement now. What is your thinking behind making this change? Describe in detail the steps you will take to implement it (e.g., modeling and demonstrating a concept, using a variety of methods and materials to explain a concept, providing opportunities for guided practice, grouping students for scaffolded instruction, etc.). What are the expected outcomes for student learning with this change? Design a lesson plan based on your current curriculum that incorporates this change.

b. Reflect on the change

Write a brief reflection on how this change enabled you to better meet the needs of all your students. What changes will you make next time to maximize learning for all students? (If you are taking this workshop during the summer, describe the learning goals and expected outcomes of this change.)

4. Evidence of student learning

Include evidence demonstrating student learning as a result of the change. Select one student and describe how s/he learns differently from other students. What did you do to scaffold instruction for this student? Include two to three performance samples and documentation on how you supported this student's learning. How will you continue to scaffold this student's reading and/or writing? Listed below are possible pieces of evidence:

- a rubric with sample attached
- anecdotal records (e.g., independent reading conference, observation from peer discussions, etc.)
- a retelling with tape recording or retelling form
- a piece of writing with student self-assessment
- a journal entry
- a response to reading
- a student reading log

Assignments

If you are taking this workshop for graduate credit, submit the following assignments for Workshop 7: Teaching Diverse Learners:

1. Examine the Literature

Read two articles on diverse learners and complete the Examine the Literature Response Chart.

2. Modeling Main-Idea Questioning

Model and provide scaffolding as your students develop main-idea questions.

3. Scaffolding Instruction

Consider and plan appropriate scaffolding for students when teaching a whole-class book or other text, and complete the Lesson Plan Chart.

4. What Did You Learn?

Write a summary of the ideas and strategies you explored in this session.

5. Create a Literacy Practices Portfolio

If you are taking this workshop for credit, you will continue constructing your portfolio of instructional practices.

Related Resources

Print Resources

Allington, R. L. *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*. New York: Longman, 2001.

Gay, G. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2000.

Lee, C. D. "Bridging Home and School Literacies: A Model of Culturally Responsive Teaching." In *A Handbook for Literacy Educators: Research on Teaching the Communicative and Visual Arts*, edited by N. J. Flood, S. B. Heath, and D. Lapp, 330-341. New York: Macmillan, 1997.

Nieto, S. *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. 3d ed. White Plains, NY: Longman, 2000.

Strickland, D. S., K. Ganske, and J. K. Monroe. *Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers: Strategies for Classroom Intervention* 3-6. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, and Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002.

Villegas, A. M., and T. Lucas. "Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the Curriculum." *Journal of Teacher Education* 53 (2002): 20-32.

Walker, B. J. "Thinking Aloud: Struggling Readers Often Require More Than a Model." *The Reading Teacher* 58, no. 3 (2005): 688-692.

Weinstein, C., M. Curran, and S. Tomlinson-Clarke. "Culturally Responsive Classroom Management: Awareness into Action." *Theory into Practice* 42 (2003): 269-276.

Web Resources

Differentiated Strategies and Games

<http://www.bankstreet.edu/literacyguide/early.html>

This site provides strategies and games for students at each level of literacy development.

Folk and Fairy Tales from Around the World

<http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/>

This award-winning site includes the text of folk and fairy tales from around the world, as well as links to other folk and fairy tale sites.

Multicultural Literature

<http://www.multiculturalchildrenslit.com/>

This site provides annotated bibliographies of children's literature from many cultures, with links to many resources from the cultures represented on this site.

Recommended Books

http://www.csusm.edu/campus_centers/csb/

This site, from California State University at San Marcos, can be accessed in English or in Spanish. It provides a list of recommended books for children and adolescents.

Teaching Reading 3-5

Teaching Diverse Learners > Before You Watch

Examine the Literature Response Chart

Title	Big Ideas	Notes and Questions
1.		
2.		

Teaching Reading 3-5

Teaching Diverse Learners > Put It Into Practice

Lesson Plan Chart

Lesson Component	Struggling Readers	Strong Readers
Before Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept Development • Vocabulary • Setting Purposes for Reading 	Provide additional instruction on concept necessary to understand the selection.	Provide additional books/readings related to concept.
During Reading		
After Reading		

Notes
